



HABITAT III URBAN DIALOGUES
Tel Aviv Thematic Meeting on Civic Engagement

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United Nations

Host Partner





Scale of Engagement:

One commentator noted that at the cluster level, consisting of around 500 households, civic engagement can first start with sharing info or asking info related to day-to-day activities using existing internet-intranet groups, whatsapp, and google groups. Second, sharing information about upcoming events within the cluster or community can be made, including conventional posters put up on notice boards. Third, engagement in sharing of civic amenity and running of the cluster facility management - for example segregation of garbage at source, checks to keep an **eye** on work of facility mgmt/ house keeping staff as well as compliance of agreed upon garbage segregation at source modalities.

At the community level, the commentator noted that engagement can start with weekly meetings of a few cluster leadership groups, that exchange working notes, engage with civic body and utility officials for collective bargaining, create a virtual voter-bank that acts as apolitical functionary at ward-type level. Additionally, at the neighborhood level, citizens would hire urban planners and other volunteer professionals to document the assets and utility of the neighborhoods and check the quality of service levels of utility and infrastructure. Once these assessments are made, a remedial action plan should be drawn up in synergy with city development plans.

Without this city engagement, the commentator predicts that a city would fail to maintain neighborhood characters, due to reduced harmony between the built environment and the people. Cities are in need of a framework within which there will be an opportunity for incremental physical development, within existing legal, economical and organizational framework.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT):

One discussion centered on the use of collaborative mechanisms and smart technologies in promoting smart civic engagement. One development expert noted that we are seeing increasing use of ICTs in many developing countries, including in Ghana around the use of mobile phones. It was noted that many services in developing cities are already provided by local governments, but that the delivery relies a lot on the private sector. One project called Taarifa, an app that helps monitor service deliver, was given as an example of this new service delivery in Ghana. Youth are also getting more involved, which is important for a country where at least 60% are below age 35. Ybridge was another example given where youth used ICTs to be involved in local governance. The World Bank also showcased such ventures in "[Ghana: Making Cities Smarter through the use of ICTs](#)".

ICTs and smart technology play a big role in making cities run efficiently and effectively. The discourse on smart cities centers a great deal on the use of smart technology. It was mentioned, however, that technology alone cannot take us where we need to be. We need strategic policies and efforts informed and shaped by the people who call the cities their home. Health and other services are not automatic results of access to smart technology; they have to be made real through policies and programmes. Smart technology used in strategic ways, as part of those policies and programmes, are extremely impactful.



Civic engagement is also very crucial in building smart cities, and the aforementioned local governments are greatly assisted by data and information on what citizens need. It also points to how citizens monitor and feedback “help make local governments become better service providers.” You noted key stakeholders: youth and the private sector. Would be interesting to see how Accra builds on this engagement, as innovative partnerships are playing out in smart cities efforts. The Tel Aviv dialogue would be very helpful in helping the global communities think through how we ensure these efforts continue and remain focused on priorities voiced by citizens. Keep engaged in the urban dialogues!

Smart Technologies and the Urban Poor:

Shack and Slum Dwellers International has done enormous work using smart tech to get the voices of the urban poor heard, enabling their engagement in urban planning and service delivery. By collecting and providing data on the needs, conditions and views of the urban poor, they are helping establish the urban poor as partners in building inclusive and resilient cities. These resonate in efforts that establish [civic engagement as key in the Tel Aviv model](#).

Additionally, the role of collaborative mechanisms and smart technologies is to ensure communication regardless of distance. It also solves the problems of communication gaps between the city and its citizens. Examples were given of innovative uses of ICTs to engage citizens in Nigeria, in which development experts noted interesting efforts focused on curbing corruption, enhancing public engagement with the police, and enhancing citizens' participation in public processes. Consequently, the government has a national e-government strategy, and Nigerians are getting [more and more connected](#), .

Smart Technologies and Inclusive Civil Societies:

Some participants noticed first hand the impact that smart technologies and collaborative mechanisms are playing in the development of inclusive civil societies. The increased access to information which derives through smart technologies seems to foster inclusive systems, where even the most marginalized members of communities are enabled access to essential social dialogues, health care information or even financial information in order to limit bounded rationality and increase equitability. Through smart digital healthcare solutions we are seeing access to preventive information that spills over into creating a system where all community members are aware of the perils, treatments and prevention methods related to various diseases.

It is through smart technologies and collaborative methods like this that we create inclusive information systems that have actual impact on the livelihoods of people and thus help create smarter and more efficient civic engagement. It is clear that, through smart technologies, we are able to democratize information and lay the foundations for social ecosystems where individuals have truly equal voices, this in turn fosters the creation of inclusive local economies that improve the livelihoods of whole communities.

Tel Aviv, which is hosting this first of the series of cities dialogues, has a lot of examples of



how they use smart tech to engage citizens, and your contribution provides a view from another region. The youth demographic in the Africa region, for instance, is very significant (1.8 billion and rising fast). How you harness their potential and engage them in developing local solutions, as social innovators, is deeply interesting (improving health outcomes, improving livelihoods and lives, engaging the marginalized, etc...).

Access to information is a pillar of inclusive governance, and equitable access to basic services is crucial in making cities and communities livable and sustainable. It is not about smart technologies per se, but how smart we are in our use of them. For significant impact, scaling up what works is important, and that requires focused support.

Libraries and Civic Engagement:

In addition, technology has an important role in civic engagement, but only if cities make sure that everyone has access to the information and skills needed to effectively use it. The IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, plays an important role for civic and public spaces, including libraries, as an important means of supporting civic engagement. The IFLA stated that cities can support civic engagement by supporting existing, funded institutions like libraries. For example, by including libraries as part of plans for regenerating cities, in the development of new cities, and as providers of e-Government services, skills training, public space and ICT access.

Libraries make Internet access available to the community at no or low cost. In many countries, public and educational libraries are the major or only providers of such access. Libraries support decision making and civic engagement by providing access to information, research and open data. Libraries support access to research, and the right to reuse research and data to create new knowledge. Libraries play a major role in cities' social, cultural and civic life. They also have become, in some places, the main source of various services as you noted, and the space where people can engage on public issues and in decision-making processes (and access to information is necessary for this). The [Global Libraries programme](#) comes to mind as an example for how organizations like IFLA closely collaborate with governments, communities, and the [development community](#) to make civic engagement real.

Migrants and Civic Engagement:

Urban growth can only be sustainable if local governments successfully address the needs of their communities. As IOM's "World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities, New Partnerships to Manage Mobility" shows, most urban population growth will come from both international and internal migration, which will present a number of challenges and opportunities for urban community development. However, it is also noted that many cities are not adequately prepared for the increasing diversity among their growing population.

Engaging migrants through civic participation, as well as through increased opportunities within local labor markets, will only be achieved by creating the necessary and systemic requirements to support the inclusion of migrants and recognizing their contributions to local communities. This is



determined, to a large extent, by the capacity of a city to adapt to the needs of its residents.

First, migrants need more representative public policies. Migrants, often organized in local associations, are involved in civic engagement processes, through a broad range of channels and forms of formal and non-institutionalized participation. Given that migrants often play a key role in driving the growth of urban population, cities will function better if migrants can participate and engage in and contribute inputs and ideas to local governance processes to inform realistic and representative local policies.

Second, cities need to change and adapt so as to recognize the benefits of diversity and promote tolerance and inclusion, in order to become better places in which to thrive and compete in the increasingly interconnected world. Well managed migration is an opportunity for cities of destination to benefit from new ideas, skills and know how. However, it is also a challenge, especially when newcomers are vulnerable and marginalized. In the short term, increasing diversity may decrease the mutual trust in the communities and present challenges to social cohesion and inclusive growth. Solutions to these challenges are the responsibility not only of migrants, but also of local authorities and communities. At the same time, facilitating diaspora participation in cities from which they originate can enable members to help with investment and build social and economic networks.

Third, while governments and cities have a responsibility to facilitate integration and social inclusion, migrants should obtain proper documents to ensure their undocumented status does not put them at risk. Encouraging migrants to take part in civic processes can support them in gaining confidence in local governance and become empowered to engage with the authorities of their country of destination.

IOM's Suggested Actions:

Access to relevant public and private services can be critical in facilitating newcomer inclusion and preventing marginalization of vulnerable populations. In this regard, digital solutions can play a key role in helping local authorities and other service providers to reach out and effectively support newly arriving residents, including providing information and training tools in various languages on migrant rights and responsibilities, intercultural orientation, job-related guidance, access to healthcare and education, legal counseling and facilitating referrals to local services and institutions. In this regard, migrant resource centers serve both migrants and local community authorities by providing services in countries of origin and destination.

Migrants are often being discriminated against, and they are especially vulnerable to fraud, exploitation and other forms of abuses. Providing orientation and accurate information, including documentation requirements and processes, will make them aware of the risks and provide access to counsel. This may also make migrants more receptive to their civic responsibilities and roles, from legal requirements to the informal expectations people have of life in a new society.

Local authorities can help dispel myths and destructive stereotypes associated with migration by encouraging public debate on the overwhelmingly positive contributions of migrants in local communities, and by creating policies that allow and embrace orderly migration and promote inclusive and cohesive communities. This will allow migrants to be agents of development and engage with the local community in opportunities for cultural events and exchanges.



Digital solutions can facilitate dialogue and enable more inclusive participation in diverse communities, in particular with respect to engaging underrepresented groups. Through social media, migrants can have their own messages conveyed in means that they themselves can frame, thereby participating in civic spaces in accordance with their cultural background. This also enables them to directly challenge any prevailing negative perceptions about them as individuals or as groups, as well as about migration in general.